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REVIEW

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OUR ANNUAL SHOWCASE
OF THE MOST EXCITING
NEW TALENT IN VISUAL
COMMUNICATIONS

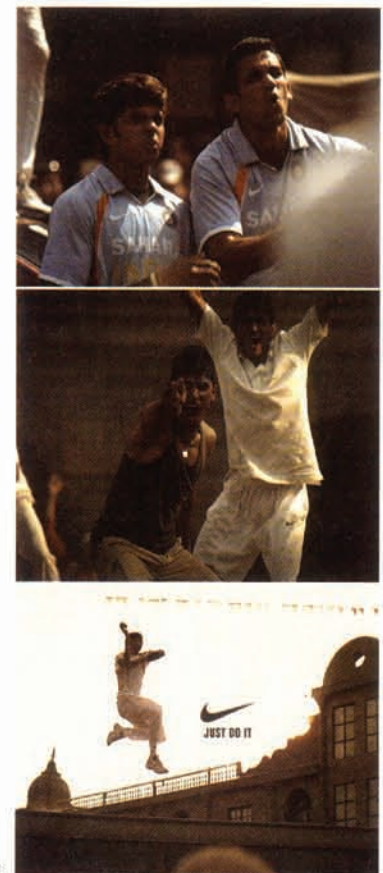
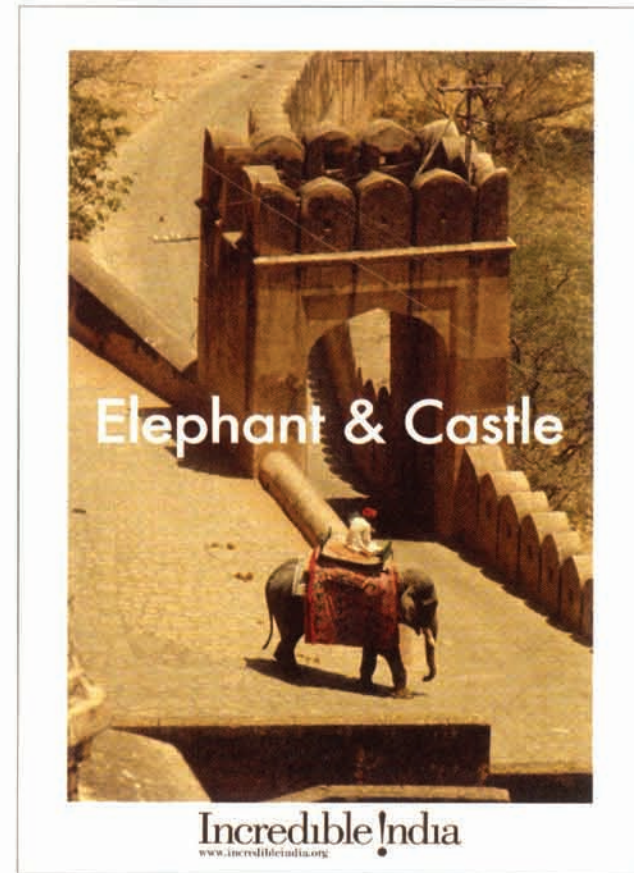


1. Incredible India tourism campaign by A advertising agency. Creative: Shuchi Takur. Photography: Manoj Adhikari/stock. A, run by V Sunil and Mohit Dhar Jayal, has recently joined the Wieden+Kennedy network.

"Being with Wieden + Kennedy gives us the chance to scale up without making a change to our working style," says Sunil. 2. JWT Bangalore's recent TV ad for Nike captures India's obsessive love of cricket.

Creative: Agnelo Dias. Director: Abhinav Deo. Production company: Ramesh Deo Productions, Mumbai. 3. Poster for Ranga Shankara theatre in Bangalore by Ray+Keshavan.

Designer: Pooja Jagdeesh. 4. Identity for the Khyber restaurant in Mumbai, by Tsk Design, Bangalore. Design team: Tania Singh Khosla, Mihika Deshpande. Photographer: Pallon Daruwalla



Detail of Somnium genero @ 0530 hrs, a painting designers/artists Jiten Mukral and Sumir Tagra. The duo collaborate on creative projects spanning art, design, advertising, film and product design. "We

think design can improve communication and solve the clutter and chaotic information which is flooded all over," they say. 6. Stills from McCann Erickson India's phenomenally successful

ad for HappyDent Whitening Gum, which gives its users such dazzling smiles they can be used to light up the city. Creative: Praseon Joshi. Director: Ram Madhvani. Production company: Equinox Films, Mumbai.

7. Poster for the Natya Ballet Centre in Delhi, which promotes classical and contemporary Indian dance, by Gopika Chowfla Graphic Design, which has created the Centre's promotional material since 2000



Eastern promise

As its economy booms, India's advertising industry is soaring, and a graphic design community is finally emerging. Eliza Williams talks to the country's most exciting creative talent about what the future holds

For a designer or advertising creative, India is a pretty exciting place to be right now. Rapid commercial growth has prompted an unprecedented client demand for design and advertising skills, while those creating the work find themselves in the exhilarating position of being able to shape and redefine India's new identity, both within the country and internationally. All this change has occurred rapidly, however, at a pace that is perhaps too fast for an industry, in graphic design at least, that is still finding its feet. Design is still often misunderstood as a profession, and with a dearth of decent design schools in the country, graduates are finding that they often receive their real education on the job, a position that stretches already overloaded designers even thinner. The bounteous amount of work has also led the lines between advertising and design to blur, with ad agencies, which are far more established and recognised within the country, tackling aspects of assignments more traditionally found within the design domain. And, of course, overseas networks and companies are also edging in, keen to pick up a slice of the action.

Despite this, there are signs that a design community is slowly evolving in India, as evidenced at the recent Kyoorius Designyatra, an annual conference that offers designers the

chance to meet and exchange ideas. The Designyatra is still in its infancy, yet this year saw the numbers of delegates double since its debut last year, with over 1,600 attendees present. The team behind the Designyatra also runs the Kyoorius Design Magazine, the only magazine in the country focusing solely on design, providing a vital voice and place for discussion for designers across the country who otherwise might feel they are working in relative isolation.

"There are many young designers in the larger cities working independently as freelancers," says Sujata Keshavan, whose design studio Ray+Keshavan was the first professional firm to set up in India, in 1989, and last year joined WPP and The Brand Union network. "They mostly work in ones and twos, there are very few design firms that are larger. By and large most of the design work in the country is still being handled by advertising agencies who offer their clients a one-stop solution for all their communication needs. Design still has a long way to go before it can be considered an industry. Professional practices and standards are not yet well established. Many freelancers have the reputation of being unreliable. There are not many design journals or magazines... Whenever one reads about design in the Indian press, it is obvious that the writer is

quite unfamiliar with design in any real sense."

"The design industry is growing slowly, the need for design is growing at a gargantuan pace," agrees Gopika Chowfla, who runs a studio of seven designers in Delhi. "With very few professional schools, the number of designers that graduate is miniscule, yet with an overactive economy, there is a demand for creative input. The gap needs to be bridged very fast, though, as things stand today, that is not happening in a hurry."

These problems often manifest themselves visually in the design work created in India, which can appear rather conservative. Or, with a lack of confidence in its own voice, it looks to the West for inspiration. For such a visually rich country, this is disappointing, though much of the imagery that we might associate with India, such as its vivid hand-painted signage and posters, is seen as the work of artisans and not as design. "[We need to] educate our audience to be more discerning of good design," says Tania Khosla of Tsk Design in Bangalore. "I feel that sometimes we are limited in how much we as designers can really push the boundaries of design. Our audience is often not visually sophisticated. This can sometimes be a challenge and sometimes a hurdle... A lot of what is produced here is highly influenced by the

West. We need to be more sensitive to our context and produce design that is fresh and relevant."

This is a dilemma that the Indian advertising industry, by contrast, seems largely to have overcome. While design may be struggling to establish its identity, the advertising industry is flying, largely due to the achievements of Ogilvy India, and the dynamism of the agency's executive chairman and national creative director, Piyush Pandey. It seems, in fact, that wherever you look in Indian advertising, Ogilvy's mark is present, with significant numbers of senior creatives in other agencies having started at the company. Ogilvy's work has set the bar for advertising across the country, creating work that contains a universal charm and humour, while remaining distinctly Indian in its style. "I guess with hindsight I can only say that our approach was to keep the Indian audience in complete focus while communicating with them," says Pandey of the secret to Ogilvy's success. "We believe that when you think local, there's a greater opportunity of going global. If you start with global, very often you end up with the lowest common denominator."

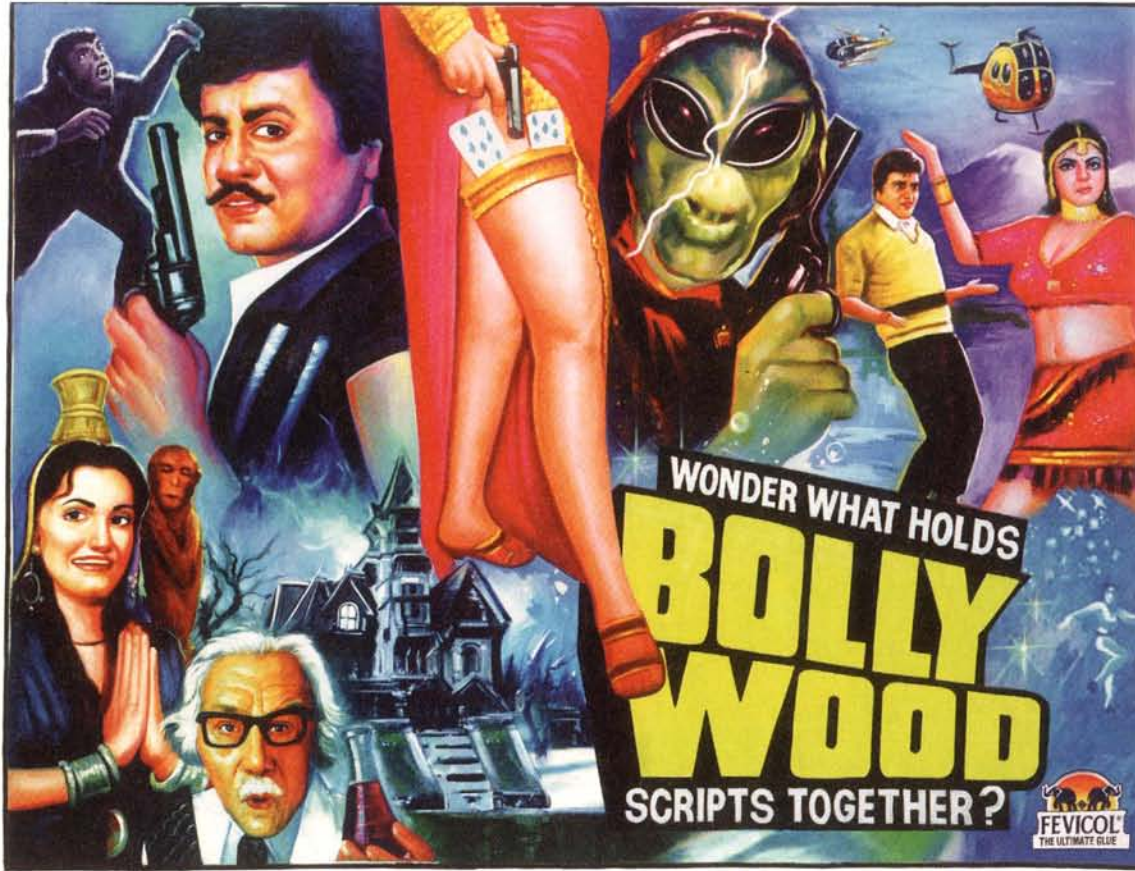
"The Indian advertising industry faces tremendous opportunities," he continues. "The market is growing, India is rocking and opportunities are knocking. The challenge ▶

1. Ogilvy India has had an enormous influence on the advertising industry in the country, introducing a style of work that contains a universal charm and appeal, while maintaining a firmly Indian sensibility. "The

relationship between design and advertising is hugely significant in India," says executive chairman and national creative director Piyush Pandey. "Not only do we have a lot of population lacking in literacy, but we

also have 18 official languages and design has the ability to transcend these problems." Shown here is a poster for Ogilvy's ongoing campaign for Fevicol glue. Creatives: Piyush Pandey, Abhijit

Avasthi, Rajiv Rao, Manoj Motiani, Shruti Nayak. 2. An entire house is painted with the Kingfisher logo, an example of India's more traditional hand-painted advertising. Photo: Milja Kuronen



◀ is to be prepared, so that we can grab the opportunity with both hands." Interestingly, rather than only looking to the West for inspiration, Pandey cites an enthusiasm for work coming out of Thailand, South Africa and Latin America, all regions where exciting ad developments are also occurring.

If anything though, Ogilvy's phenomenal success could be said to have over-influenced Indian advertising, making it difficult for new approaches to come through. Perhaps that will change with the recent acquisition of boutique agency, A, by Wieden + Kennedy to be the network's Indian arm. "Agencies here either copy a Western style or are asked to match Ogilvy's style of advertising," comments V Sunil, partner at the Delhi-based agency. "We feel we are very Indian in our sensibility but we're the new Indian cool guys — all of us would be very comfortable in New York or London, but we're very proud of the whole Indian thing and are able to show that in our work."

Also emerging are smaller, more experimental teams working across both design and advertising, such as Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra, who work collaboratively across a wide variety of media, creating graphic design, music videos, product design and art installations. Thukral and Tagra are aware of the social impact design can have and

are keen to use it to, "improve communication and solve the clutter and chaotic information which is flooded all over".

This is also a priority for designers Aman Khanna and Carlos Coelho, who, after studying at the I.C.C, set up the agency Infomen focusing on information design, with offices in London and Delhi. "It's an interesting time to be in India as the country is witnessing major changes in its economic, social and physical structure," says Khanna. "Good design could highlight the changes and help people to understand them better. This not only gives an amazing opportunity, but also brings a sense of responsibility."

On the whole, however, the notion of design occupying a socially responsible role, which so concerns Western design at present, has yet to emerge in India, a fact that the Kyoorius team are keen to address. "The awareness of the role that good design can play in society is still very low," says Kyoorius Design Magazine's editor, Mouli Marur. "The effect of the indiscriminate use of plastic and non-biodegradable material for packaging is yet to sink in. The euphoria of the opening of the market overshadows considerations of sustainable design."

Marur stresses that it is important for the current boom in design events across India to address these concerns and

promote awareness of, "not just brands and profit, but also the various issues that plague a fast-developing economy with a very pluralistic population. It needs to strive to arrive at a balance between design purely for corporate profit and design that is sustainable."

With all these issues circling in such a rapidly expanding market, demands on designers in India are high. It seems however that, rather than being in competition with one another, the interweaving of advertising and design could help achieve some of these aims. "The advertising industry is very well established in India, while design is still trying to carve out a little piece of territory for itself," says Sujata Keshavan. "I personally don't see the relationship between advertising and design as contentious. As far as I can make out, creative people in advertising are no less engaged in the act of designing than are 'designers' in design agencies. There may be a difference in approach or priorities, or in the mediums used, but essentially both groups of people are designing things in their own way. I believe that in order to carve out a space for themselves, designers have used advertising agencies as 'the other', or 'that which I am not', which I believe is unnecessary. I think there is work and space for both industries to thrive." ■